of unusual disorder a considerable volume of trade was always carried along one or other of the roads.

This world trade has meant much to Syria. It has brought her wealth. It has given her inhabitants an occupation; until recently much of the trade not only passed through Syria but was handled in its passage by Syrian merchants. This has affected the nature of the Syrian towns, the caravan towns on the routes and the bazaar towns at the end of them. They have been cosmopolitan, the meeting-places of worlds, and their inhabitants have become quick-minded and flexible.

Trade has also affected the political history of Syria. Again and again powerful rulers in the neighbouring regions have stretched their hands over Syria, to tap the wealth of her cities and her routes. Often they have also desired to use her agricultural and forest resources. At other times it has been her strategic position which has tempted them; they have wanted to use her either as a defence-post against rivals or enemies in other neighbouring countries, or else as a bridge across which their armies could pass to attack those countries. The armies, like the caravans, have trodden immemorial paths. They have come sometimes up the Palestinian coast from Egypt; sometimes across the Euphrates from Mesopotamia or beyond; once, and most memorably, from Arabia; but most often from Asia Minor by way of gaps in the mountain barriers between Cilicia and northern Syria. Thus it has come about that for great parts of her history, Syria has been a province of an Empire larger than herself. On the whole, these have been the times of her greatest prosperity. Often she has been not only a part of an Empire or a world, but also its frontier.

Besides the movements of goods and armies, there has been a third movement, that of population. As a consequence of trade or war, or for other reasons, immigrants have flowed into Syria throughout history. There has been a trickle from Egypt and the Mediterranean countries, a larger stream from Anatolia, and occasional inrushes from central Asia; but above all there has been an uninterrupted flow from the Arabian peninsula. Not only individuals but whole tribes have come in. Nomads of Arabia have moved northwards and westwards, either because means of subsistence in the peninsula were insufficient or else under the attraction of plunder; from preying upon the cultivated land of Syria they have gradually

11: Hourani 8-4 (no date) 1946 MD1 Syria 181

abandoned the wandering life, taken to agriculture and mingled with the settled population already established in the country, which was itself largely the product of a similar process at an earlier time.

The immigrants from the Arabian peninsula brought with them their distinctive customs and ideas and one or other of the 'Semitic' family of languages. Together with Mesopotamia on the other side of the Fertile Crescent, Syria has been throughout history the place where what may, by a not very misleading simplification, be called the 'Semitic' stream of population and influences has met and mingled with other streams. She has served also as the limit of the emigration from Arabia. The Semitic peoples and their languages have never taken firm root beyond the Taurus Mountains. Even in Syria they have not been unopposed, but they have always been of great importance. A large proportion of the population of Syria can trace its descent at least in part to earlier or later immigrants from Arabia; and while Mediterranean and other influences have largely affected forms of government and the culture of the cities, the language and the customs of the countryside have always been predominantly Semitic.

The two sets of influences, that from Arabia and that from other directions, have interacted in various ways. There has been conflict at times, and at times peaceful mingling. Often tension of some sort has existed between the more predominantly Mediterranean and the more predominantly Arabian elements in the population, and between successive waves of settlers from the same source. Sometimes that tension has mirrored itself in the individual soul, which has felt itself drawn in two directions, towards the desert and towards the West. It is only very rarely, if at all, that the influences have blended so completely as to remove all tension. It is true that there has always been a tendency to that end. Rulers and settlers from the Mediterranean lands have to some extent adopted Semitic ways and Arabian immigrants have acquired some of the characteristics of a Mediterranean people. But the process has never been allowed to complete itself; further invasions have occurred, a new Government has established itself, or there have been further waves of immigration, and the process of assimilation has had to begin again.